

The Frightful Ones

By Richard Maples

**What does a boy do when he meets a danger
from another world? Should he run for help—or
fight bravely as he comes face to face with—**

The Frightful Ones

Right then he was the scariest he'd ever been in his life. Yet even as he watched the spaceship turning within the glow of its flaring jets, he kept thinking of his father's warning:

"A boy's duty, son, is to keep his eyes and ears open and to give the alarm. We must be alerted ... or we're doomed."

It had been drummed into him ever since the landing and explosion of the rockets. He'd been very little then and it was hard to understand. But they'd explained it carefully—over and over again.

The rockets were a test. They'd been fired by beings on another planet. Some day the beings themselves would come to invade.

He'd often thought about it—especially at night in bed. And he'd dreamed about it, too. Horrible dreams. And now the dreams had come true!

Trembling, he watched the silver hulk aim its jets at the ground and begin to come down. It slipped past him with a roar. Its fires reddened the hillside. It settled with a jarring thud. Then all was silence.

Edging forward, he peered down into the glen. The dust and smoke was clearing and he could see most of the ship gleaming evilly in the twilight...

Others, he thought, must have seen or heard the landing. Soon they'd come to fight off the invaders. He'd be found, quivering with fear, and branded a coward. He must do something...

A sudden metallic clanging made him jump. A light flicked on. He sucked a deep breath. The beings!

They stood on a platform next to a trap-door. Three of them: squat, fat, and silvery-white ... like the insects he often found under flat rocks.

One held the light. The other two carried strange looking boxes. They made their way down a ladder and began to set up the boxes on the ground. This was his chance, he told himself. While they were busy, he could climb to the top of the hill and escape down the other side.

But he'd only taken three steps when he stubbed his toe on a rock, jarred it loose, and sent it pelting into the glen.

They hurried over to see what it was and he got a better look at them. Their wrinkled skin hung from their bulgy bodies in thick folds. Insect feelers waved over their humped backs. Flat expressionless faces glittered in the light of their lamp.... He shuddered.

After they'd looked at the rock, two of them started climbing in the direction from which it had rolled. The third stayed behind, beaming the light to guide the way.

Cringing against the hill, he moved along the ledge to a point where it curled past a jutting crag. On the other side of that he'd be hidden from view and could make a run for it.

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